

*Article*

# Public Planner's Perception of the Community Participation in Planning and Operational Decision-Making in Iskandar Malaysia

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**Abstract.** Rhetorically, effective community participation in urban planning helps the local planning authority in making a better decision, hence provided a sustainable and quality living environment to the community. The allocation for the community to participate in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia is highlighted in the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172). This study attempts to examine the effectiveness of community participation in planning and operational decision-making in Iskandar Malaysia. Iskandar Malaysia comprises of four local planning authorities that are responsible for governing the spatial planning in the region. Thus, it leads to the questions; what constitutes the effectiveness of community participation in the planning process? To what extent does the current participatory process offer a genuine opportunity to the community to incorporate their interest in the planning and operational decisions? This phenomenological study used thematic analysis to evaluate the insight claimed by selected public planners as the key-informants using the in-depth interview as the method for data collection. Following the 12 interviews conducted; a total of 37 themes and 68 sub-themes are transpired. A table is used to presents the factors that influence the effectiveness of community participation in Iskandar Malaysia. The findings suggested that public planners in Iskandar Malaysia believed the effectiveness of community participation in the region is significantly associated with the operational compared to structural and cultural dimensions of the process, hence hinder the capability of the community to access to genuine participation avenue.

**Keywords:** Community participation, planning decision, operational decision, Iskandar Malaysia, thematic analysis, public planner.

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## 1. Introduction

A local authority is responsible for providing quality living to its community; as well as accountable for their decision. However, the impact of urbanisation on major cities in Peninsular Malaysia has seen local planning authority (LPA) face a daunting challenge to accommodate the increasing demand for basic amenities and affordable housing [1]. Besides, the LPA needs to provide more opportunity for the community to participate in the decision-making process [2].

Conceptually, community participation is essential in helping the decision-maker to deliberate a decision by incorporating the community's opinion and knowledge in the decision-making. Community participation is also an effort to democratising the planning and operational decision-making with stakeholders' interest is inclusively considered, hence resolved conflicts [3], [4].

Community participation in urban planning in Peninsular Malaysia (except Kuala Lumpur) is guided by the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) [5]. Rhetorically, community participation is important in achieving a sustainable and quality living environment, by incorporating the present and future community's interests [5]. Thus, the questions raised in this study are; "what constitutes to the effectiveness of community participation in the planning process?" and "to what extent does the current participatory avenue offers a genuine opportunity to the community to incorporate their interest in both planning and operational decisions?"

This phenomenological study has employed an in-depth interview to collect data and thematic analysis to analyse the data. The number of interviews required is determined using the concept of data saturation with past research that offered the guideline to estimate the sample size for a phenomenological study is reviewed. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of community participation in planning and operational decision-making in Iskandar Malaysia (IM). The evaluation is elucidated by thematically analyse the public planner's perception. Findings suggested that the effectiveness of community participation in the decision-making process is significantly associated with the operational than the structural and cultural dimensions of the process. The study concluded with the present practices of community participation in the planning process in IM to be ineffective; thus hinder the ability of the community to incorporate their interest in both planning and operational decisions.

## 2. Community Participation in Planning and Operational Decision-Making in Peninsular Malaysia

Community participation in urban planning provides a clear picture to decision-maker of public preferences, hence lead to a better choice made through the incorporation of community's experiential knowledge

into the process [3], [4]. Also, community participation promotes the democratisation of decision-making by addressing the interest of multiple stakeholders [3], [4]. This section elaborates the current state of community participation in both planning and operational decision-making in Peninsular Malaysia.

### 2.1. Community Participation in Development Plan-Making Process

As one of the urban planning mechanism, the main objective of the development plan is to guide the direction of future land development in Peninsular Malaysia. To produce a sustainable development plan; the community must be able to participate in the development plan-making process [5], [6], [7]. The participatory process in the development plan-making has been underlined in several sections of Act 172.

Section 9, Act 172 has underlined the publicity process as the primary avenue for the community to participate in the State Structure Plan (SSP). There are two phases of publicities underlined - in the first phase, community and other stakeholders are informed of the key findings of the assessment report; while the second phase is for the State Planning Committee (SPC) to present the proposed development direction and strategy to the public [8]. Nonetheless, it is comprehended that the provision for the community to participate in the process is limited after the assessment report, and the draft plan is prepared. The community did not involve in the data collection and proposal stages thus led to the deficiency of community experiential knowledge in the proposal.

Besides, the legitimacy of data gathered by the LPA is dubious as the community are not well-informed of the entire process. The method for information sharing outlined in Section 9 (2) is also less adaptive to the diversity of stakeholders which led to the marginalisation of certain segments from participating in the process.

The element of community participation and incorporation of community's interest is further highlighted in Section 10(3) (a) where SPC has to consider any objection made before the approval of the SSP. Following the objection, the objector is eligible to attend and justify his concern in front of the public inquiry and hearing committee [8]. However, SPC is not obliged to incorporate the objection in their decision. On the other hand, the SSP is required to translate the national development strategy; hence demonstrate the centralisation of the development plan-making process [9].

In the context of the Local Plan (LP), section 12A stated the needs for LPA to promote community participation in preparing the LP. Community is invited to a publicity program through conventional methods such as local newspaper, banner and radio broadcast [8]. The community is entitled to submit their objection concerning the LP during the publicity program. Like

SSP, objection received to be brought forward to the public inquiry and hearing committee [8].

Empirically, community participation is absent during the proposal stage hence raises the concern of the soundness of the proposal in addressing the community interest. The validity of the data collection is also debatable due to the method of engagement and communication. It appears that the medium for information sharing and engagement as stated in Act 172 are limited thus marginalised certain community segments from the planning process and its benefit.

Meanwhile, the public inquiry and hearing committee is established under Section 14 (1), Act 172. The function of this committee is to organise a public hearing session that allows the objector or their representative to justify their concern, hence help the SPC in making the decision [8]. However, the outcome of the public hearing is unattainable to the community. It is dubious to what extent does the community participation is effective enough to influence the operational decision.

Additionally, SPC is inclined to consider any relevant matter associated with the conformity of the LP to the SSP. It suggests that the state government has a greater influence on the way the decision is made. Any possibility for the LP to be superior to the SSP is when the SPC satisfied the differences between both plans are resulted by the out-dated of the SSP [8].

## 2.2. Community Participation in Planning Permission Process

According to Act 172, the community is eligible to participate in the planning permission process attributable to the absence of LP [8], [10]. Section 21 (6) has underlined the needs for the LPA to notify the neighbouring landowner of planning permission. Following the notification, the neighbouring landowner has the right to object to the application within the time given. Later, both applicant and objector are invited for hearing to allow both parties to justify their standpoint [8].

The current state of urban planning suggests that most urban areas in Peninsular Malaysia have been gazetted with LP, thus prevent possible community engagement to take place at the earliest stage of the planning permission. Subsequently, it makes the planning permission to be a direct discussion between the LPA and applicant without involving those who might be affected by the development.

The non-existence of community participation during the pre-consultation and decision-making stages has led to a decision is made by public planner using rationale thinking rather than incorporating the local knowledge. However, planning permission as the

operational decision by the LPA might inflict high compensation if the decision is to be revoked [11]. Therefore, greater community involvement in planning permission can lead to better decision deliberated, hence prevent potential disputes.

In Section 22 and Subsection 22 (2A), it is comprehended that the LPA will deliberate any objection before the granting of planning permission. However, this avenue is doubtful as a result of the absence of notification to the neighbouring landowner [8], [10]. Whereas, in the case of state-interest development involving the SPC as the decision-maker and required National Physical Plan Council (NPPC) advice; it has left the LPA in an almost no-win situation, thus offer meaningless participation to the community. Top-down approach has resulted in the operational decision to emphasis more on national's interest rather than the local's [12], [13].

Legislatively, the community can appeal against any granted planning permission within one month. It can be made through the appeal board as stated in section 23 (1), Act 172. Nevertheless, only those who have submitted any objection as elaborated under section 21 (6) are eligible to appeal [8]. That is to say, the opportunity for a community to influence the decision is potentially impassable from the first stage of planning permission.

## 3. Background of Iskandar Malaysia

Iskandar Malaysia (IM) is one of the development corridors that are established during the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan as the catalyst for the economic growth of the country. Formerly known as South Johor Economic Region (SJER), IM is established following the need to focus on economic and spatial development in the South Johor based on its strategic location which is bordering to Singapore [14].

The establishment of IM is based on the vision to become "A Strong and Sustainable Metropolis of International Standing" which is formulated through the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) and Comprehensive Development Plan ii (CDPii). Both plans are prepared by the Iskandar Region Development Authority (IRDA) to ensure the underlined development strategies in the plans are corresponding to the national and state strategies. Besides, both plans guide the direction for future development for the metropolitan region that is to provide a liveable and attractive environment for living and operating a business [15]. IRDA is legislatively instituted through the Iskandar Regional Development Authority Act 2007 (Act 664) where it is chaired by both Prime Minister and Johor Chief Minister.

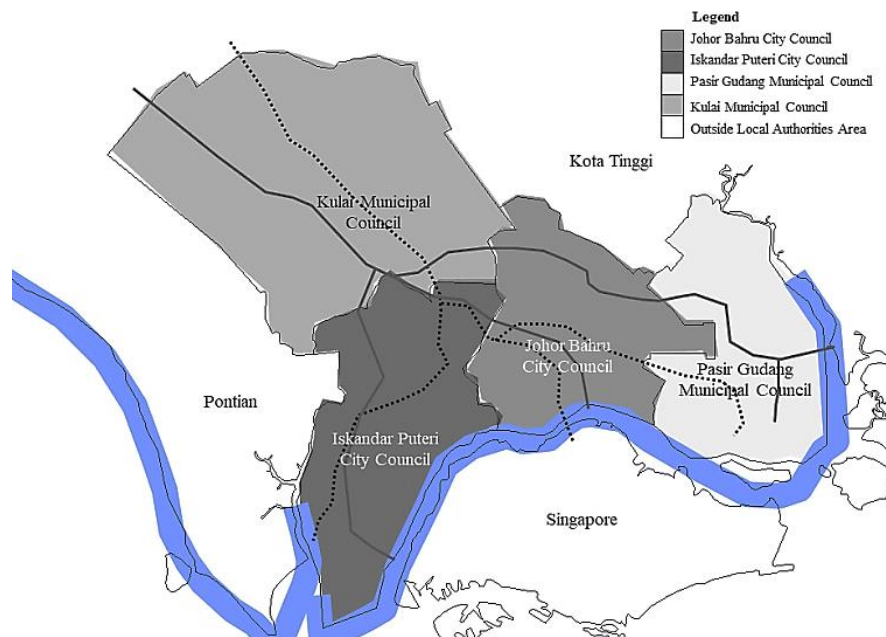


Fig. 1. Map of the Case Study Area

Meanwhile, IM comprises of the entire districts of Johor Bahru and Kulai and a small portion of Pontian. Five LPAs are located within the boundary of IM namely Johor Bahru City Council, Iskandar Puteri City Council, Pasir Gudang Municipal Council, Kulai Municipal Council and Pontian District Council (**Fig. 1**). However, this study focuses on both Johor Bahru and Kulai Districts and its respective LPAs as both districts cover a large portion of the metropolitan region. Besides, the urbanisation rate in both districts is also higher than Pontian district.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Respondents

Public planners of LPAs in IM are at first approached to gather their permission to be interviewed. Public planners are selected using the purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method based on three criteria; local authority, their position and scope of work. Purposive sampling is selected to ensure qualitative data are gathered from the key-informants that can provide valid and comprehensive information concerning the research subject [16].

Nonetheless, in this study, several lower-ranked officers are also selected as respondents following the recommendation by the higher-ranked officers (**Table 1**). Based on the concept of the key informant by [17] and [18], the underlined criteria will ensure that public planners with a vast knowledge of the planning procedure were selected to provide comprehensive insight of the current state of community participation in the planning process in IM.

Seven public planners selected are from the Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru and Majlis Bandaraya Iskandar Puteri where the urbanisation rate is high (**Table 1**).

Based on several visits, Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru and Majlis Bandaraya Iskandar Puteri appear to have more officers in the planning department compared to the Majlis Perbandaran Pasir Gudang and Majlis Perbandaran Kulai. There is a probability that the number of officers available is associated with the scale of developments that need to be governed in a district.

The sample size in this study is determined using the concept of data saturation where it is defined as “the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” [19]. Saturation is elaborated further in the following subsection.

### 4.2. Data Collection

A series of in-depth interviews with key informants have been conducted to gather qualitative data from the public planners in IM. The in-depth interview’s questions are focused on public planners’ knowledge and perception of the community participation in the development plan-making and planning permission. An in-depth interview allows the researcher to garner insight of a phenomenon through a small number of respondents [20], [21]. [20] further stated that more detailed information can be gathered using the in-depth interview as it offers a convenient platform for both researcher and respondents to discuss and communicate.

[22] in his introductory of phenomenological research highlighted the employment of in-depth interview as one of the method that can be considered in understanding people’s motive and action, as well as their experience of a phenomenon. Respectively, [23] defined phenomenological research as collective experience by several individuals which data can be collected through in-depth interview. Subsequently, in-depth interviews

with key informants are significant in the process of gathering valuable information on the state of urban planning in IM.

In this study, semi-structured interviews are carry out to provide flexibility and fluidity to both researcher and respondent in putting out and answering a question. It gives respondent more freedom to respond to each question hence lead to interesting findings [18]. Put differently, the semi-structured interview provides the possibility for both researcher and respondent to discuss and expand the dimension of a question hence knowledge of both parties.

At the start of each interview, respondent is explained of the purpose of the study. To put the respondent to ease, the researcher has assure to the confidentiality of the respondent. Permission to record the interview is also requested in every session although one of the respondents did reject. Number of variables were recorded from the interviews namely the intergovernmental relationship in planning; access to information and process; coordination and collaboration between stakeholders; legislative framework; capacity of local authority; skill and attitude of public officer; influencing capability; transparency and accountability; participatory method; public awareness and knowledge; residents committee; and community representation.

### 4.3. Saturation of Data

Scholars have used the concept of saturation as a benchmark in determining the sample size for qualitative research [19], [24], [25]. Scholars identified data saturation as the point where new information was not produced by data collection and analysis [19], [25]. Similarly, [24] described the concept of data saturation with data replication and redundancy.

Albeit the idea of achieving saturation in data collection and analysis is useful in qualitative researches, it provides a limited guideline to researcher for estimating the sample size before conducting the data collection [19], [26]. It is based on the fact that most of the researches require an estimation of sample size during the proposal stage.

Subsequently, some literatures that offered a guide to the calculation of the sample size for phenomenological research is reviewed (**Table 2**). The literature review thus suggested that the data in phenomenological research is saturated between 10 to 12 interviews. As a result, in performing this study, researcher has approximated a total of 12 in-depth interviews as the benchmark to reach saturation. Correspondence to [26], the researcher too believes that it is best to overestimate rather than to underestimate the sample size.

Table 1. Profile of public planner (PP).

<b>Public Planner (PP)</b>		
<b>Local Planning Authority</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru [PP1; PP7; PP9; PP11]	4	33.3
Majlis Bandaraya Iskandar Puteri [PP3; PP5; PP12]	3	25
Majlis Perbandaran Pasir Gudang [PP4; PP8]	2	16.7
Majlis Perbandaran Kulai [PP2; PP6; PP10]	3	25
<b>Position</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Director of Department	1	8.3
Deputy Director of Department	1	8.3
Head of Department	3	25
Officer	4	33.4
Assistant Officer	3	25
<b>Scope of Work</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Development Planning and Planning Control	3	25
Development Planning	5	41.7
Planning Control	4	33.3

Table 2. Summary of Data Saturation in Phenomenological Researcher from Empirical Studies.

Authors	Definition of Saturation	Findings
Creswell (2007) [23]	n/a	Ten in-depth interviews to reach saturation
Morse (2000) [26]	n/a	It requires 6 to 10 interviews to reach data saturation
Guest et al., (2006) [19]	"..the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook".	12 interviews to reach 92% data saturation
Coenen et al., (2012) [27]	"Saturation refers to the point at which an investigator has obtained sufficient information from the field".	Nine interviews to reach saturation in a deductive approach; and 12 interviews in an inductive approach
Guest <i>et al.</i> (2017) [28]	Similar to Guest <i>et al.</i> (2006)	3 to 6 focus group discussions are likely to reach 90% data saturation

#### 4.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used by researchers who prefer to use a low-level interpretation. This method is sufficient to analyse the information gathered from the in-depth interview of public planners in IM. It is justified

by [29] argument that thematic analysis is capable of delivering an insightful analysis of research questions and facilitates in answering the research questions by gauging the key themes of the data. The [29] framework is applied in this study to explain the analysis process (**Fig. 2**).

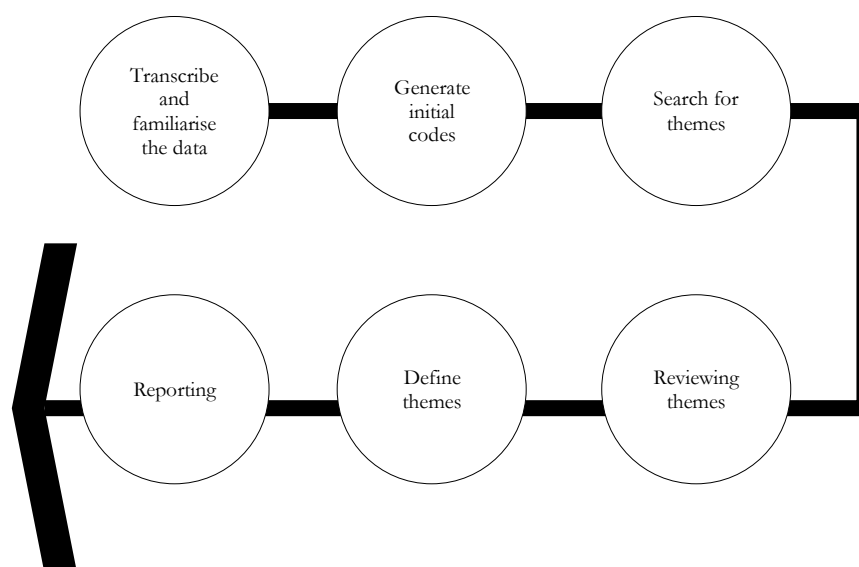


Fig. 2. Braun and Clarke's framework for thematic analysis [29].

**Step 1 – Transcribe and familiarise the data:** The audio files from the interviews are listened several times, transcribed and manually coded using the Microsoft Office program. The justification for the manual-coding rather than auto-coding is based on the limitations of data analysis software such as NVivo and Atlas.ti that are highlighted by previous researches. Even though it is apparent, that this software helps in making the coding process more effective, it does not help much in in-depth data interpretation [30]. Besides, there is a tendency for the data to be over-coded [31]. Besides, the effectiveness of such software to produce reliable results also depends on the competency of the researcher in operating the software. There is potential for the data to be inaccurately analysed [30]. [32] argued that the

dependency on the data analysis software in qualitative research might result in the analysis being too heavily focused on the statistical aspect of the data such as the frequency of a code that occurs. There is a tendency for the analysis to clash with the original concept of qualitative research.

To simplifying the transcribing process, the respondents are coded as PP for a public planner (PP1 to PP12). Nearly all interviews are performed in Bahasa Malaysia with several English terminologies are used. The researcher has employed the edited transcription approach in transcribing the audio files. It is based on its suitability in formalised the written script, hence made it readable and publishable [33].

**Step 2 – Generate initial codes:** At this stage, the researcher has only coded data that are relevant to the research questions. The coding in this study is in the form of statement by respondents. Similarities in responses between interviews are highlighted and organised using the Microsoft Office. Transcripts are reviewed several times with new or modified codes are revised.

**Step 3 – Search for themes:** All relevant coded data are then grouped into various themes. A table is used to classify and display the relationship between themes and codes that based on three dimensions – operational, structural and cultural as adapted from [34] in evaluating the efficacy of community participation in planning and operational decision-making. Each dimension comprises several variables (as stated in 4.2). The table allows the researcher to review the level of themes, thereby contributing to the emergence of sub-themes. In this study, the majority of codes are linked to more than one theme.

**Step 4 – Reviewing themes:** In this stage, all themes, sub-themes and codes are revised and updated in order to create cohesive ties between them. At this point, the fundamental question is, does each relation seem to be relevant? The researcher used the ‘cut and paste’ function in Microsoft Office to reorganise the data in the transcript. Themes and codes that have similar meaning are discarded.

**Step 5 – Define themes:** The main questions asked in this stage are; what are the relations built between themes and sub-themes? How do these relations attain the research questions? In contrast to [33] thematic map, a table is used to illuminate the variables (factors) that possibly influence the effectiveness of the participatory process in IM (**Table 3**). **Step 6 – Reporting:** The findings are reported and discussed.

## 5. Result and Discussion

**Figure 3** displays the overall themes emerged following the analysis of in-depth interviews with public planners in IM with **a total of 37 themes and 68 sub-themes** are transpired from the 12 interviews conducted. Apparently in this study, data saturation is achieved at the fourth interview with **94.5%** of the themes emerged.

Themes and sub-themes that pertain to the research questions “what constitutes to the effectiveness of community participation in the planning process?” and “to what extent does the current participatory avenue offer a genuine opportunity to the community to incorporate their interest in the planning and operational decisions? are documented in the table below (**Table 3**). Frequencies of both themes and sub-themes that emerged throughout the analysis process are recorded to determine the impact causes by corresponding themes and sub-themes to the participatory process. The impact is divided into three levels – **low impact (1-4 incidents); medium impact (5-8 incidents); and high impact (9-12 incidents).**

**Ten respondents** believed that the present urban planning system in both the IM and Peninsular Malaysia is more centralised and the decision-making process is based on the top-down approach. They believed that the upper-tier planning authorities namely the NPPC and SPC hold greater influence than the LPA in making a decision. Thus, a decision made might not embody the local interest [PP2; PP3; PP4; PP5; PP6; PP8; PP9; PP10; PP11; PP12]. In addition, **9 respondents** agreed that the LPAs is still highly depended on the conventional methods in sharing information and engaging with the community either during the development plan-making [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP6; PP7; PP10] or planning permission [PP3; PP4; PP9; PP10; PP12]. **11 respondents** meanwhile, stated the lack of a platform for collaboration in the framework of Act 172 as one of the factors that influenced the effectiveness of community participation [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP7; PP8; PP10; PP12]. For example, the community are being excluded from planning permission process due to the availability of LP for Johor Bahru and Kulai thus left only the principal submitting person (PSP), applicant and authorities to communicate and engage in the process [PP4; PP5; PP6; PP9; PP10; PP12]. As a result, the limitation of access to planning information and process for collaboration among the community leading to the existence of gaps in knowledge and participation among stakeholders hence benefited certain stakeholders and segments.

Following the analysis, it appears that the planning statutory and guideline is essential to the state and local authorities in making planning and operational decisions [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP4; PP5; PP6; PP7; PP8; PP9; PP10; PP11; PP12]. It is based on the fact that **all respondents** highlighted the technical factor as the main justification behind any decision taken in development plan-making and planning permission. Some of the respondents also believed the technicality of the process and document involved has hindered the community from participating effectively in preparing the development plan [PP3; PP11].

Furthermore, **11 respondents** highlighted the current practices by the LPAs to incorporate the community interest in the planning and operational decisions. In preparing the development plan, a series of focus group discussion is initially conducted with specific stakeholders to gather their opinions [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP7; PP10]. As for planning permission, it is down to the competency and professionalism of a public planner to involve the neighbouring community if the proposed development can potentially affect the community [PP4; PP5; PP9]. In the event of an objection, after permission is granted, a dialogue between community, developer and LPA is held to resolve the dispute [PP4; PP5; PP6; PP9; PP10; PP11; PP12].

Following the interviews, it is understood that any objection and suggestion received from the publicity program for the LP is considered based on its relevance to the notion of urban planning [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP7; PP8; PP10; PP11; PP12]. Unfortunately, majority of the



interviewed public planners (**9 respondents**) believed the community are not technicality sound in urban planning [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP5; PP6; PP7; PP9; PP11; PP12]. As a result, it will dampen their capability to participate, hence influence the planning decision effectively. **Nine respondents** meanwhile linked effective community participation with the psychological factor [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP6; PP7; PP9; PP10; PP11; PP12]. The

respondents believed the public planner's perception towards the community had influenced the way they treat the participatory process [PP2; PP3; PP7; PP11]. It is subsequent to their impression that the community predominantly the low-income segment is still immature in making objection and suggestion that concerning urban planning [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP7; PP9; PP11; PP12].

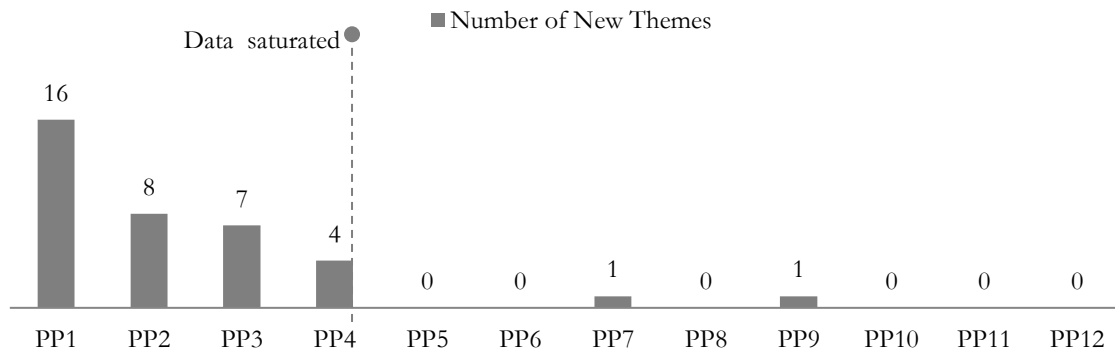


Fig. 3. Themes emerge during the analysis of 12 in-depth interviews with public planners (PP)

Table 3. Factors Influence the Effectiveness of Community Participation in Planning and Operational Decision-Making

Dimension	Variable	Theme	Sub-theme	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8	PP9	PP10	PP11	PP12
Operational	Intergovernmental relationship in planning	Translation of development strategy	Top-down approach												
			Top-down & bottom up approach												
		Relationship between authorities	In decision-making												
			Intervention in decision-making												
	Coordination & collaboration between stakeholders	Factors considered in making decision	Technical factor												
			Political factor												
			Market factor												
		Incorporate community interest	Statutory instrument												
			Through engagement												
			LPA's initiative												
		Collaboration between stakeholders	Planning platform												
			Non-planning platform												
Structural	Access to information & process	Access to information	Limited medium												
			Role of community representative												
		Access to planning process	Knowledge related access												
			Selected location												
	Capacity of local authority	Technicality of document	Gap in understanding												
			Lack of manpower												
		Administration capacity	Lack of capital												
			Lack of financial												
	Skill & attitude of public officer	Treatment of community participation	In development planning												
			In planning permission												
		Public officer professionalism & skill	Public planner's professionalism												
			Public planner's initiative												
		LPA's perception	Participation is time-consumed												
			Participation is associated with knowledge												
			Participation is associated with psychological factor												
			Participation is associated with psychological factor												
Influencing capability	Private developer's domination		Influence in planning decision												
			Attitude & perception												



[illegible]

Effective community participation also considerably depends on the competency and professionalism of a public planner in handling the participation process. **Seven respondents** believed that public planner should be more attentive and understand their area well, especially when it comes to addressing the community interest. The public planner should go extra-mile in delivering information and implementing publicity process to ensure all community segments have the access to the information and process [PP3; PP4; PP5; PP6; PP7; PP8; PP12]. In relation to the operational decision, the public planner will not grant permission until all the technical requirements are fulfilled by the applicant [PP2; PP4; PP8; PP9; PP10]. The professionalism of public planner will ensure the guidelines are well-executed and community interests are incorporated in decision-making.

Structurally, the limited platform for community participation which is within the framework of Act 172 has led to the community mainly the low-income segment to have little access, hence capability to involve in the planning process [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP6; PP7; PP9; PP10; PP11; PP12].

Meanwhile, more than half of the public planners that are interviewed (**7 respondents**) claimed that the community only willing to participate in the process that involves their interest. It is a daunting challenge for the LPA to attract the community's involvement especially the low-income segment [PP2; PP3; PP6; PP7; PP9; PP10; PP11]. Moreover, the respondents do believe there is a connection between the awareness of planning procedure and the property ownership [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP5; PP6; PP7; PP10; PP11]. **Nine respondents**

believed that the community generally did not have sufficient knowledge on urban planning [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP5; PP6; PP7; PP9; PP11; PP12]. Therefore, there is a gap in awareness and participation between the private sector and the large property owner and ordinary people.

The final factor that influences the effectiveness of community participation is the representation of local councillor. It is important for the local councillor to consistently share information on urban planning with their community due to their role as the mediator between the local authority, community and private developer [PP1; PP2; PP3; PP4; PP6; PP7; PP8; PP10; PP12]. Also, the community can indirectly exert their interest in decision-making through the local councillor. Nevertheless, the representativeness of local councillor is depends on their attitude [PP3; PP6; PP7; PP10; PP12] and proficiency of planning procedure [PP3; PP7; PP9; PP12].

Eventually, the findings from thematic analysis suggested that the current community participation in planning and operational decision-making in IM required improvement primarily to its operational dimension. It is supported with the majority of respondents highlighted that operational variables such as intergovernmental relationship in planning, collaboration and coordination between stakeholders and access to information and process are important to the effectiveness of community participation. Based on the elaboration of the relationship between themes and sub-themes, it is conceivable to conclude the improvement on these operational aspects will potentially improve both structural and cultural aspects of the process in long-term, hence create better planning environment to the

community. Successively, it will promote greater collaboration between stakeholders; hence empower the capability of the community to effectively participate in the planning and operational decision-making.

## 6. Conclusion

In continuing discussion on the efficacy of community participation in urban planning, this phenomenological study anticipates that the integration of community interest in the planning and operational decisions would contribute to greater community life. Thematically, the researcher has identified the factors that have affected the effectiveness of the current practices in IM which is based on the perception of public planners of LPAs. The current state of community participatory in IM has demonstrated the inability of the present avenue to provide genuine participation to all community segments. The prominent limitation highlighted is associated with the operational aspect of the process. Following the finding, it helps decision-maker to address the shortcomings of current practice, henceforth promote genuine participation to the community.

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